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**Anton Pavlovich Chekhov
THE SEAGULL**

**Opened 23 October 2003
Fészek Klub Kupolaterem, Budapest**

Running time: 3 ½ hours with one interval

CAST

Irina Nikolaevna Arkadina, an actress - **Eszter Csákányi**

Pjotr Nikolaevitch Sorin, her brother - **József Gyabronka**

Konstantin Gavrilovitch Treplev, her son - **Zsolt Nagy**

Nina Sarechnaya, a young girl - **Annamária Láng**

Boris Trigorin, a writer - **Tilo Werner**

Evgeni Sergeevitch Dorn, doctor - **Sándor Terhes**

Shamraev, estate manager - **Péter Scherer**

Polina Andreevna, his second wife - **Borbála Péterfy**

Masha, his daughter - **Lilla Sárosdi**

Medvedenko, teacher - **László Katona**

Hungarian translation by **Géza Morcsányi**

Dramaturg - **Anna Veress**

Scenography - **Márton Ágh, Tamás Bányai**

Assistant to the director - **Péter Tóth**

Production manager - **Máté Gáspár**

Directed by **Árpád Schilling**

Kostia Treplev, the rebellious young writer claims "new forms" in the first act of Chekhov's *Seagull* - and in the fourth act he concludes: "no matter whether new forms or old..."

The company of Krétakör made about the same way in more than three months of work with the play. During this time, we felt that we got closer and closer to the secrets of this astonishingly intricate play and absorbed ever more its complex world and figures. We wished to show it as a story of today about today's people, so we changed or eliminated elements that linked it too closely to Chekhov's age. At the end, we came to a form that is reduced to minimum, with nothing but a few actors: people who live, love, play roles, lie to themselves and let others lie to them, who strive for happiness, love, success - and nothing but inevitable failure awaits them.

A century ago, the *Seagull* - by Chekhov and by Stanislavsky - started a theatre revolution that still determines our concept of theatre playing. The theatre of Chekhov - as we got convinced during the work - is still alive and valid, and it is as hard to revolt against it as to find veritably "new forms".

SYNOPSIS

Act One

Scene 1

Masha and Medvedenko are waiting for the beginning of Kostia Treplev's play. Medvedenko wonders why Masha wears always black: he finds his life is much harder, being poor. He confesses to Masha but the girl can not return his feelings.

Scene 2

Kostia comes with his uncle Sorin and sends them away: the performance has not begun yet, no one is supposed to be here. Sorin asks Masha to tell her father he should let the dog free: it barked all night.

Scene 3

Sorin complains about life in the village - since he is in pension, he must live here. Kostia shows him his theatre: an empty space, no decoration, no costumes, only the trees, the lake, and the sky. The performance should begin exactly with the moonrise, but Nina, his protagonist, is late. Asked about his mother's bad temper, Kostia explains that she is jealous. He characterises his mother, the famous actress as vain and miserly, who does not love him because his presence makes her appear older. He also criticises the kind of routine theatre she makes, and claims for new forms. He disapproves of her affair with the writer Trigorin and complains about his own situation: he is nobody, he has no money, no profession. He tells his uncle that Trigorin is a decent man but as a writer not the equal of Tolstoi or Zola. Sorin explains that he likes writers, once he himself wanted to become one.

Scene 4

Nina hurries in: her father would not let her come, she has only half an hour to stay. Sorin leaves to tell the others: the performance will soon begin.

Scene 5

Nina tells Kostia, her father does not want her to become an actress. She teases the young man in love with her and admits she is anxious to perform before Trigorin, such a famous, foreign writer. She thinks, Kostia's play is hard to play: no characters, just a monologue. In a theatre play there must be love, she says.

Scene 6

Enter doctor Dorn, and Polina. She is jealous because Dorn showed interest for Arkadina. In answer, he tells her he is 50 years old; his relationships with women brought him much good, most of all because he is a good gynaecologist and an honest man.

Scene 7

The coming of Shamraev, the manager of Sorin's estate, Arkadina and the rest of the company interrupt them. Shamraev tells Arkadina old theatre stories.

Scene 8

Arkadina urges Kostia to begin, and quotes the lines of Gertrude (you turn my eyes into my very soul...); Kostia answers with Hamlet's reproachful lines.

Scene 9

The performance begins with Nina's monologue: „All men and beasts, lions, eagles and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish...“. Arkadina, according to Kostia's fears, spoils the show with her remarks. Kostia, offended, stops the play.

Scene 10

Arkadina is upset: she thinks Kostia's pretension to begin a new theatre era to provoke her. Medvedenko thinks one should write a theatre play about the hard life of village teachers like himself. Arkadina tells Trigorin that some years ago, Dorn was the Casanova of the neighbourhood. She asks Masha to look for Kostia.

Scene 11

Nina emerges; she is introduced to Trigorin. The writer tells her that his greatest delight is angling. Shamraev comes with a theatre story again. Nina has to leave.

Scene 12

Arkadina tells the company, Nina is penniless because her father signed her heritage over to his new wife. While leaving, Sorin asks Shamraev to let the dog free but he refuses: he fears thieves.

Scene 13

Alone, Dorn tells us he liked Kostia's play, and so he tells him when Kostia comes back. The young man is moved but he wants to see Nina. He tells Masha not to run after him all the time.

Scene 14

Masha asks Dorn to help her: she suffers because of her hopeless love for Kostia.

Act Two

Scene 15

Arkadina asks the doctor to tell who looks younger, she or Masha. You of course - he answers. I could play a 15-years-old, she says. She tells about her first meeting with Trigorin.

Scene 16

Nina comes with Sorin and Medvedenko. Sorin tells the girl has three free days to stay with them. We learn that Trigorin is down by the lake, angling. Arkadina asks Nina about the bad mood of her son - Masha says he has a sorrow and tells how he looks like a true poet when reading his play. Sorin falls asleep; when told he should cure himself, he accuses the doctor of not giving him any medicine. Dorn explains there is nothing to cure about being 60 years old. They argue whether he should stop smoking. Sorin complains that, contrary to the doctor who had a full life, he did not really live, only sat 28 years in the cultural committee. Masha leaves.

Scene 17

Dorn thinks Masha is secretly drinking. Arkadina is bored: she would prefer to be home and study a role. Sorin too thinks it is much better to live in the city.

Scene 18

Shamraev comes with Polina; we learn that Arkadina wanted to ride to the town but the manager would not give them horses, as they all work on the fields. He threatens with quitting; Arkadina wants to go back to Moscow. Sorin and Nina leave to try and change her mind.

Scene 19

Left alone, Polina asks Dorn to take her to him: she is fed up with her despotic husband. Dorn's answer: I'm 50 years old. The entering Nina tells them: Sorin has an asthmatic attack, Arkadina weeps.

Scene 20

Kostia brings Nina a dead seagull: he shot it and threatens to shoot himself too, because of Nina being so cold toward him. He thinks she does not love him because of his failure with the play, so he burnt it. He is jealous of Trigorin.

Scene 21

Trigorin tells Nina he is sorry to leave: he had wished to know Nina better. Nina speaks admiringly about his fame and his „bright“ life. This annoys Trigorin, who explains how writing consumes his life. He is full of doubt and thinks he will always be a lesser writer than Turgenev. Nina tells him she would endure anything if she could become an actress. The dead seagull gives Trigorin inspiration for a short story about a young girl, destroyed by a man out of idleness. Arkadina comes to announce: they are staying.

Act Three

Scene 22

Masha and Trigorin are in the middle of a conversation. We learn that Kostia tried to kill himself but was not severely injured, that Masha still loves him but she decided to marry Medvedenko hoping she would forget him, and that today Trigorin and Arkadina intend to leave.

Scene 23

Nina comes; by an even/odd game she wants to find out whether she should become an actress, but Trigorin does not give her advice. She brought a good-by-present: a medallion with Trigorin's name and the title of his book carved in. She asks Trigorin to give her two minutes more before he leaves.

Scene 24

Arkadina comes with Sorin. Trigorin asks where he can find his works in the house.

Scene 25

In spite of his rheumatism, Sorin wants to join them into town. Arkadina thinks Kostia wanted to kill himself because of jealousy - which is why she takes Trigorin away. Sorin depicts Kostia's general situation as hope- and futureless and asks his sister to give Kostia some money. Arkadina pretends not to have any. Medvedenko enters with an impossible story about some village teacher, he is sent out. Sorin feels unwell, but still wants to go to town.

Scene 26

Kostia asks his mother to give some money to Sorin. I'm an actress, not a banker - is her answer. She begins to change his bandage and makes him promise not to harm himself again. Recalling memories of his childhood, Kostia tells his mother she is the only one he has got but accuses Trigorin with spoiling their relation. Their arguing ends up with Arkadina calling her son "a nobody" and Kostia his mother "a whore". Arkadina consoles Kostia in tears saying she takes Trigorin with her - then Nina would love him again.

Scene 27

Trigorin has found the sentence in his book referred to on Nina's medallion: "If you ever need my life, come and take it." He asks Arkadina to stay one more day. She knows that Nina is the cause. Trigorin tells her he feels a kind of love he never felt before: in his youth he had to work hard on his career. Arkadina pleads, cries, flatters, and begs for Trigorin to leave with her until the man yields.

Scene 28

Shamraev comes announcing - with a funny theatre story - that it is time for them to leave.

Scene 29

Trigorin returns pretending he left his booklet there. Nina waits for him to tell that she decided to move to Moscow and become an actress. The writer proposes her a hotel to stay in and asks her to let him know as soon as she gets there.

- INTERVAL -

Act Four

- since Act Three, two years have passed -

Scene 30

Masha comes, Sorin asked her to look for Kostia. Medvedenko pleads with her to come home - we learn that they are married and have a child - but she will stay for the night. Medvedenko should go home on his own but he fears Masha's father would not give him a horse.

Scene 31

Polina brings bedclothes: Sorin wants to sleep in Kostia's room. We learn that Kostia became a veritable writer, the newspapers pay to publish his works. Polina asks him to be kind to her stepdaughter, Masha.

Scene 32

Masha tells Polina that Medvedenko has been offered a teaching job in another district, and when they move away she would forget her love for Kostia.

Scene 33

With Sorin and Dorn Medvedenko comes back, talking again of money. Masha tells him to leave. We learn that Dorn has been abroad in the last two years and that the company is waiting for Arkadina who picks up Trigorin at the railway station. Sorin wants to give Kostia an idea for a novel: "The Man Who Wished", he himself wished several things - to marry, to become a writer, to live in the town - and all of them failed. They resume the old discussion with Dorn - the latter preaches resignation, the old man claims medicine, as he wants to live.

Scene 34

Kostia comes. Dorn asks him about Nina. We learn that she left home to live with Trigorin, they had a child who soon died. Trigorin left her for Arkadina whom he was with while he lived with Nina, cheating on them both. Nina's professional life was also a failure; she played in provincial theatres, but badly. Nina refused to see him, so Kostia gave up on following her around. Nina would send Treplev troubled letters and sign them "The Seagull." Now she is staying in the town. Medvedenko

recently met her walking nearby. Nina's parents have put guards to keep her away from their house. Sorin tells he also loved her.

Scene 35

Arkadina and Trigorin arrive. As a conciliatory gesture, Trigorin brings Kostia a copy of the latest magazine with a story of his. He tells Kostia, he wanted to see the place where his play was performed: he wants to write a story about it. Masha asks her father to give Medvedenko a horse but Shamraev refuses.

Scene 36

The company begins a game of lotto, traditional in this house on long autumn nights. While playing, Arkadina tells of her successes on stage, and they discuss Kostia's writings: he got bad reviews, Trigorin tells his works are obscure, hallucinatory; only Dorn speaks for him. Arkadina admits she has never read anything written by his son.

Scene 37

Shamraev tells Trigorin that he stuffed the seagull that Treplev had shot. Trigorin does not remember of asking him to do so. Arkadina calls everyone to dinner.

Scene 38

Kostia, alone, speaks of his writing and criticises himself for using clichés. He compares his writing to Trigorin's with envy. He concludes: no matter whether new forms or old, only they should stream freely from one's heart.

Scene 39

Nina enters fearing Arkadina would find her there and asks Kostia to lock the door. She speaks confused. She says she is a "Seagull" and compares herself to a homeless wanderer of Turgenyev. She cries and says she feels better because she has not cried in two years. Now Kostia is a writer, and she became an actress but her life is difficult: she is on her way to a provincial town, Yelets. Kostia tells his love to Nina and his desperation since she left him and asks her to stay with him. Nina tells Kostia her suffering when playing badly. She repeats Trigorin's idea for a story about a girl who is destroyed like the seagull by a man who has nothing better to do. She now is an actress and knows that for an artist not the success is important but perseverance. Nina confesses that she still loves Trigorin. She remembers the innocent, subtle feelings that she and Treplev felt when they put on their play. She recites lines from the play and leaves.

Scene 40

Kostia fears she could be seen - Arkadina would be sad if she knew of Nina's visit. He destroys his violin.

About the play

After making a lot of promises that he would never deal with theatre again, after a good many one-act plays performed all over Russia, Chekhov started to write a new drama on the 21st of October, 1895. "I am writing with pleasure, although I offend against the laws of theatre. Comedy, three female and six male roles, four acts, a landscape (a panorama of the lake), many discussions about literature, little action, five pounds of love." On the 18th of November he wrote: "I finished the play. I started forte and finished pianissimo, breaking all the rules of theatre art. It turned to be a short novel."

About the production

Our production of Chekhov's *Seagull* opened a new chapter in Krétakör's history. For the first time, we chose a great classic play, which gives a chance to our actors to present their characters in a truly great, complex and fine manner. Chekhov's figures carry no message: each has its own truth and through that they provoke us to a finer, more mature thinking. In *The Seagull* Chekhov presents a whole complex web of human and emotional relationships. Naturally what we were most intrigued by were the problems of our own lives, of that of an artist: how talent works, what real talent's like, what it means to have no talent, whether talent is a constant state or can it disappear, on the other hand can it suddenly appear; how's talent related to success, does one follow from the other, why can some talented people use their gift, while others get lost? And needless to say, we were interested in the conflicts between private life and profession: does one promote and support the other or are they counterproductive; how can we bring the two in harmony, is fulfilment possible in both areas or does is one inevitably detrimental to the other?

We started rehearsing at the table, analysing and debating about the play's every sentence at length. This period was followed by Krétakör's traditional two-week "withdrawal" from the world, when through improvisations we try to grab and elaborate the figures and the fine and complicated web woven between them. The following rehearsals on stage helped create the style of the performance: how or in what direction the realism required by the play will be tilted. Throughout the four-week analysis, and even down the final week of rehearsals we would often argue for hours about a single Chekhov line. In Schilling's earlier productions, major script revisions subordinated even important texts to the demands of our performance. This time, however, we respected the original lines and instructions, save for some small changes necessitated by the site. We also changed the ending (without altering the text), driven by our ambition to tell the story in a completely original and authentic way. In this performance, which placed special emphasis on theatre and the theatre of life, we gradually rid ourselves of all theatrical means. Under the golden dome of the Fészek Arts Club (our original venue), there was no set, no costumes (the actors perform in their own clothes) and practically no lighting effects, only sentences, feelings and thoughts, so near and so clear that one can almost touch them.

At the beginning of the 2004/2005 season our show moved to the Old Studio of Thália Színház (where Leonce and Lena, Liliom and Woyzeck are also playing), but wherever *Seagull* plays, the found space is our set and the actors' morning mood determines their costume.

A dramaturg's journal

After the first waves of enthusiasm and happiness of working on *The Seagull* - everybody knew on the forehand, still it was an adventure to experience what a perfect play it is – it was the time of never-ending questions. Rehearsals by the table lasted for a month, for lack of a rehearsal space in the director's flat. We had extreme arguments about the meaning of certain sentences or scenes; about the features and intentions of the characters; about what Anton Pavlovich might have thought here and there; and what messages the play transmits for us. It was a question of main importance to reveal the elements of the play that now, a hundred years later, have the same meaning for us as it had for the contemporaries of Chekhov.

After the long discussions, we withdrew to a wooden house in the forests of the Transylvanian Harghita Mountains. While living together working intensely, we tried to seize the essence of the scenes and characters by means of improvisation. The collective immersing in the play sketched unambiguously our direction: as time passed, the formal solutions got more and more clear, we used fewer and fewer tools and relied more and more solely on the Chekhovian text. Then in Fészek Club - the choice of the venue came partly from a constraint, but proved to be fruitful after all - we started stage rehearsals, based on the already final text version and the director's concept. Our aim was to present *The Seagull* as a contemporary story of contemporary people. Therefore we tried to make a selection and substitute those elements that were on one hand connected very strongly to Chekhov's time, or which, on the other hand, contradicted the situations and persons of our performance.

We had the feeling of getting gradually closer to the core of the play in each phase. We found answers to many of the questions, while other problems remained unsolved in order to provoke the spectator's thoughts.

It is difficult to summarise the discussions we had during the rehearsal process; still, I would like to mention some of the issues we argued the most about while preparing the performance, and which hopefully the onlookers will also consider.

One of the central themes of *The Seagull* is the problem of being or not being talented and the question of artistic success and failure. Each Chekhov-director offers a different interpretation of Treplev's talent, it is always a question how gifted Treplev and Nina are - maybe he could have been a great writer if he survived. His rebellion

against clichés and routines is undoubtedly justified, but what is the basis this uproar is standing on? Was Treplev really an unfulfilled art innovator or has his rebellion grown merely from the disillusion caused by the mother's bitterness and the jealousy against Trigorin? Is there really "something special" in his play failing in act I, as Doctor Dorn has stated it, or is Arkadina right when calling it "gibberish"? Treplev demands "new forms"; but are there now, at the beginning of the 21st century, any new forms in the theatre that we have not seen somewhere before? It was obvious what the play rebelled against when it was written: a the strongly repressive society and culture of the time gave an answer. But what does the "old" mean today?

And who is Nina? Is she a naive "village girl", swept off her feet by fame, collapsing when reality proves her dreams untrue? Or is she a cunning careerist, who wants to get to the top with the help of the famous writer? Is she an ambitious talent worthy of a better life, destroyed by a weak, irresponsible man ("noticed her and destroyed her just of boredom")? At the end of the play, when after her tragedy she returns as a provincial actress - is she broken? Is she deranged? Did she really follow her vocation, as she claimed? Or is it the same game, the same lie of life as her love for Trigorin?

There are slightly different issues to discuss in connection with Arkadina and Trigorin, the two established artists standing on the other side of the generation conflict. We don't know if Arkadina is really a great artist, but she is undoubtedly a famous actress and we can also see her vanity, her egoism. In her case the question is whether she is playing just a game. When and in what degree is she honest? Is she right when having ideological and emotional clashes with her son, what are her intentions with him? Is she striving to find a careful balance in her relation with her son or is she simply dominating over Trigorin?

And Trigorin, characterising himself as a "languid, mellow man", is he simply trying to live a comfortable life or is he an artist full of vocation, who submits private life to creation? Here I have to mention that in our performance a German actor, Tilo Werner is playing the role of Trigorin. Tilo Werner is working with the company for the second time now (he was in *Fatherland, My All* in 2002). We realised that he fits perfectly Trigorin's character: the famous writer arrives to the province not from the capital, but from abroad.

The character of Sorin - Pjotr Nikolaevich - Uncle Pjotr also raises a bunch of questions. What is his problem in fact? Is he really ill? Is he perhaps dying during the performance (as he did during the rehearsal period in one of the scene variants)? Or does it make him ill that he can't act or decide? Is it his problem that he has never done anything useful? According to the original text, Sorin was a judicial president, almost a state counsellor, but as these notions have some kind of obscure meaning for us and probably also for the contemporary spectator, we substituted this with a

profession more familiar for the modern audience. Thus in our interpretation he became the president of the county cultural committee.

Doctor Dorn, the permanent adversary and debate partner of Sorin, is also a mysterious character. He is perhaps the only person who doesn't want anything - is he standing above all? Is he a wise onlooker who regards everything from a philosophical perspective? Or, on the contrary, is he a cold person with no sentiments, excluding feelings for his own comfort? Does he not react to Masha's plea, because he knows he can't help her? Does he refuse to take over others' problems? Is he simply condemning Masha just as everybody else?

Does Polina have a reason to be jealous? Is she really madly in love with the doctor or is she only bored with her husband? Why does she interfere with Masha's problem in Act 4? Is she sorry for the girl or is she just killing time? In the performance we have slightly changed Polina's role: she became Masha's stepmother, instead of the original mother-character; our Polina is only a few years older.

According to some of the interpretations, Masha is the "secret heroine" of the play. She is always on stage, each act starts with her; she adores Treplev, but what does she think about the others? Is she angry with them? Does she despise them? Does she consider herself superior to the rest? Is she a drinker because of her timidity? Does she really think that she can blot out her love for Kostia by marrying Medvedenko? Chekhov cut a great deal of Medvedenko's text in the final version in order to stop him from becoming a caricature (these texts have survived in the censor's book). We reinserted a few of his fussy sentences, hoping that we still did not falsify the author's concept.

And finally Shamraev, the bailiff. A practical man, does he flatter Arkadina out of respect for the arts? Or does he actually despise the whole intellectual company? Does he know that his wife has a love affair with the doctor? Is he jealous or indolent?

We discussed hundreds of such issues connected to the features, sentiments, intentions of the characters; the relations they have to each other, how these relations change, transform and develop during the performance. Chekhov's play presents the complicated net of the characters' human and emotional relations in an incredibly subtle and precise way. However, this is only one layer of the play's meaning.

The other, also very important topic is connected to theatre and producing theatre. As we immersed in the work more and more, we had the strange feeling, that Chekhov has been playing an amazingly refined and artful game both with the audience and us. He starts this drama in which everybody is playing a role, with staging a stage with no scenery but merely the lake and the moonrise, while perfectly knowing that it will be presented in a theatre where there is no lake, no moonrise, but scenery. "It

drives me mad when these ancient fossils play to me in a room with a wall missing how people eat, love and wear their coats" – says an actor at the beginning of the play most often in a room with a wall missing, performing how Kostia Treplev eats, loves and wears his coat. Chekhov's Treplev, denying the falsehood of this theatre wants a theatre where life is "as we see it in our dreams". Still Chekhov himself has not written surrealist dream-theatre, but plays to be presented in three-walled rooms instead.

In their time, the "Seagull" of both Chekhov and Stanislavsky was the starting point of a theatre revolution that determines our notion of the theatre to this day. Chekhov's truth, Chekhov's theatre is still a living and valid. This is what we learned from our rehearsals and discussions again. It is just as difficult to revolt against it as it is to find a new form that never existed before. Thus we drew the conclusion that Kostia Treplev drew at the end of the play: "it's nothing to do with old or new, just let it flow from the heart."

Anna Veress

FROM THE REVIEWS

Seagull won the prize of the **Best Production** at the National Theatre Festival (POSZT) in 2004, as well as the **Audience's Award**. **Tilo Werner** was voted Best Supporting Actor, **József Gyabronka** was awarded Best Performer by the Actors' Jury, **Annamária Láng** Most Promising Young Actress, as well as Best Actress of the Season by the City of Budapest.

"The *Seagull's* success is more than well-deserved. I am especially glad, that the jury of the spectators also found this production the best. This is the proof that professional or critical acclaim does not necessarily have to be different from popular acclaim. It is not only complicated productions difficult to understand and scary for the average spectator that can be original, artful or of high quality."

László Zappe, Népszabadság, 16 June, 2004

There is no scenery, the actors perform in their own clothes, the light of the room is kept unchanged, the metal cupola above our head is strangely echoing the voices... As a matter of fact, the Fészek Club is not even a theatre. This becomes untrue, however, if theatre is where theatre is made - and if so, then it is here we have the best theatre today in Hungary.

Judit Csáki: The naked seagull. Magyar Narancs, 30 October, 2003

There are a lot of shy metaphors in the performance, the most dramatic being the body of the seagull thrown down in a plastic bag, the feathers flying into Nina's face. The symbol of the theatre is interweaving the entire performance. At the end of Act I (there is no break!) the actors bow, and they play the whole narrow-minded

Hungarian applause ritual. Later on they announce the end of Act II and the beginning of Act III. But they do not come back to bow in the end, we have to damage the barricade of chairs at the entrance put there by the actors, who thus follow Chekov's instructions. And while we try to come to our senses, the actors applaud us from the outside, they clap rhythmically, as we - Stalin's best disciples - always have done, and, not being able to openly manifest our sentiments, we still do in theatre. They take us for fools, but we deserve it.

Tamás Koltai: Ez siráj! (Cool seagull). Élet és irodalom, 31 October, 2003

The Schilling-company is making a much better theatre than the ones within the structure, but this group has passed over the rebel period. They are a team made up of real individuals. They constantly do wrestling experiences on the methods of theatre making. This time they are searching - also because of the exigent circumstances - what happens if they remain on stage alone, with no helping aids. They don't become lonely. They are able to bend on each other, they react so sensitively to the slightest gesture of the partner that the atmosphere is filled with excitement from the very first moment, while seemingly nothing has happened. It's "only" people talking to each other, they meditate, they long for something, try to have their own ways, and in the meantime they damage their own lives here and there. All this is sometimes funny, sometimes ironic, extremely cheeky and tragicomically unbearable. *Bóta Gábor: Könnyedebb és elmélyült pimaszságok. (Easy and deep cheekiness). Magyar Hírlap, 8-9 November, 2003*

The question of Árpád Schilling's *Seagull* is what old things are we revolting against, when there is nothing new under the sun, when renewing the theatre is impossible. What does revolting mean and is it justified? – this remains a question. For this production poses questions. It is an experimental undertaking: digging back to the roots. It investigates and integrates the lessons of the play's earlier interpretations, those of revolting theatres, while trying to formulate the multi-layered global substance of the piece for a contemporary audience. (...)

One has the feeling these actors have gone through some cruel psychodrama, where they exposed the suppressed passions of their soul, searched in invisible corners and called forward all the frightening knowledge, tearing up healed wounds and re-living their most dramatic experiences of mankind, themselves, love etc. All this, however, is not shown in its private reality, but with acting tools, carefully measured, naked and composed tones, gestures and voices. They are dead, yet living puppets, balancing between life and death, theatre and reality.

Gabriella Nagy, litera.hu

On Tour

“Árpád Schilling's Kretakor company (recently at the ICA with a very different *Misanthrope*) played *The Seagull* in a small, elegant room, with minimal lighting, no set, few props and the actors in street clothes, achieving a miracle of close-up emotion in the process.”

Ian Herbert: Theatre Record

A Selection of Reviews at the Edinburgh International Festival

Scotsman, Monday 22 August 2005

The Seagull

JOYCE MCMILLAN

THE HUB

THE idea that Chekhov's characters are us - that they offer us some special shock of recognition or affinity rarely achieved by the creations of other playwrights - runs like a thread through a century of Chekhov criticism, but I doubt whether there has ever been a production that expresses that idea more powerfully than this display of raw dramatic skill and energy from the Kretakor Theatre of Budapest, directed by 31-year-old Arpad Schilling.

As the show begins, the audience is sitting on three makeshift tiers of seats around a simple wooden floor-space, and it's only when a casually-dressed young couple in the front row begin to chat a little more loudly and insistently than normal that we realise that they are Masha - in love with Konstantin, who does not love her - and her devoted suitor Medvedenko, who is determined to marry her whether she loves him or not.

Gradually, the rest of Chekhov's characters begin to emerge from the crowd and, for more than three hours, Schilling's wonderful company - led by Eszter Csakanyi as ageing actress Arkadina and Zsolt Nagy as her unhappy son Konstantin - offer us a compelling and unforgettable masterclass in how the essence of Chekhov's drama lies not in white lace dresses and samovars, nor in some hopeless nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Russia, but in the words and actions which reveal, in all their rawness, the fundamental human yearnings that drive the characters - from the desperation of the young man who knows that his adored mother does not love him, to the sad, indignant rage of Arkadina's brother Sorin, the dying man of 62 who still feels that his life has not quite begun.

There's something about the end of Schilling's production - which comes suddenly, before Chekhov's final scene - that seems to cheat the audience of necessary emotional thinking time, after the awful bleakness of the long final conversation between Konstantin and Nina, magnificently delivered here by Zsolt Nagy and Annamaria Lang.

But for the rest, this is a near-flawless production of one of the greatest plays ever written. It transforms our view not only of the characters, who were so recently just part of our 21st-century crowd, but also of the rest of the audience, all suddenly transformed before our eyes into potential Ninas and Arkadinas, Konstantins and Sorins, in their own right.

Final performance tonight, 7pm

**The Seagull, The Hub, Edinburgh
Prayer Room, Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh
Raw Chekhov - with a twist**

*By Kate Bassett Independent online
Published: 28 August 2005*

If you wanted classic Chekhovian white linen and a scenic lake, then the Edinburgh International Festival's no frills production of *The Seagull* was going to come as a shock. Directed by Hungary's fast-rising Árpád Schilling, this portrait of frustrated souls in a rural backwater was played out by his superb Hungarian troupe, Krétakör Színház, in a spot where they'd seemingly just been dumped - the far side of The Hub's main hall without any set. This is startling, refreshingly raw yet subtly refined too.

On the night I attended, some people - during the extended pause before the play began - made loud comments about the cast being tardy. However, Schilling's quiet little joke was on them, for Chekhov's characters were already among the audience, indistinguishable in everyday gear, waiting for the action to start. That is implicitly the story of their (and our) lives. It's also a highly intelligent and humorous move, adding an extra theatrical frame to this piece which already contains a playlet-within-a play.

With his small burly physique, Zsolt Nagy's hoodie-wearing Konstantin looks stolid but exudes a pit-bullish anger and needy babyishness as he tries to get his mother - the preening diva, Arkadina - to watch a homegrown performance of the avant-garde monologue which he has penned and which is to be enacted by his sweetheart Nina - the mesmerising, nervously coltish, ruinously star-struck Annamária Láng.

Schilling's 180-degree twist is also ingenious, making the playlet into a promenade piece with Nina dashing behind the audience, followed by all Konstantin's bemused guests, except Eszter Csákányi's dumpy, subtly ghastly Arkadina. She remains in her now centre-stage seat, superlatively hogging the limelight. Sándor Terhes' as the smoothie doctor, Dorn, is all the more shockingly uncaring and funny too when he directly flashes us a sardonic glance while patting Polina, his weeping bit-on-the-side.

At the same time, most of the acting would make Stanislavski weep with joy regarding its naturalistic detailing. This is one of the most quietly brilliant ensembles I have ever seen, with their tiniest gestures all painfully telling. The sensitivity to agonising unhappiness in everyday lives is extraordinarily acute. Schilling's major textual adjustment - having Konstantin symbolically smash a violin rather than shoot himself - did produce a somewhat confused, very long pause before the audience realised that this was the end. (...) Really you needed to go twice, and just listen the second time round to the passionate, grief-cracked Hungarian voices. Sadly, though, this was only on for four nights.

As for Prayer Room, the writer Shan Khan's 2001 Edinburgh play, *Office*, was sorely substandard and his second is no better, even if Angus Jackson's production includes commendable performances (Hannah Watkins, Iddo Goldberg and Tolga Safer) alongside 2D caricatures. Khan's topicality is obvious. When Muslim, Jewish and Christian college students are obliged to share one devotional room, they start getting territorial and violently aggressive, with the tolerant and innocent drawn into the fray. But, oh boy, Khan's writing is theatrically wooden whenever he drops out of droll Asian-Cockney slang. This premiere actually isn't timely either, after the Fringe Festival's glut of terrorism plays - several of them far better than this.

k.bassett@independent.co.uk

Archive: THE SEAGULL. To 22 August.

_POSTEDON 2005-08-22 10:54:14 by [Timothy Ramsden](#)

Edinburgh

THE SEAGULL

by Anton Chekhov Hungarian translation by Geza Morcsanyi

Thrillingly unconventional - and finally bleaker than Chekhov intended.

A few minutes into Chekhov's first major play the young *avant-garde* would-be playwright Konstantin talks about the open-air performance of his play, staged in the back-garden for an unlikely audience of his old-style star-actress mother Arkadina and assorted visitors and estate-workers. "No sets, no costumes," he says in the simultaneous English translation spoken into earpieces in Hungarian theatre company Kretakor's production.

It has a rare resonance, for that's exactly how Arpad Schilling's production plays the whole *Seagull*. It takes several lines to realise the speakers are sitting among the audience, in modern, everyday clothes. Young Masha, wearing black because she's in mourning for a life that can only get worse, could be any one of us gathered round 3-sides of a bare floor-section in the Edinburgh International Festival's Hub HQ. (It's a pity the Hub space is backed by the assertive huge pulpit and carved wooden screen from its ecclesiastical days. A plain surface would have been ideal.)

Schilling's not a dedicated minimalist as Kretakor's explosive free version of *Woyzeck*, set on a mesh-surrounded building-site, showed in London last month. But this *Seagull* recreates the fabulous impact of the play's second first-night, when Konstantin Stanislavsky's production showed what had previously seemed vapid to contain the immediacy of life. Like watching people in their own homes, audiences said. Unlike one Edinburgh Fringe company this year, Kretakor don't actually visit homes. but this stripped-bare. dressed-down production's the next best thing.

It exploits the play's theatrical moments. Nina bows, seeking applause after her last-act recall of lines from Konstantin's first-act play. Age-defying Arkadina insists she can still play a 15-year old and proceeds to flirt with a front-row audience member through adolescent blushes and giggles, an act undermined a moment later as she has to stretch a book to arm's-length to read the print.

But it's at the other extreme the production makes its strongest impact. Without a stage or scenery there's no frame to propel dialogue forward. The reason for the show's length is that when the characters lack energy to carry conversation forward, it slowly dies. And, without any need for emphasis, lassitude and unspoken emotion becomes clear.

For Schilling's central success is in unlocking Chekhov's mix of the pace of real-life and the sense of urgency and being purposefully alive theatre can bring. Life here becomes performance. Nina's performance in Konstantin's play has her cutting a way through the onstage viewers and requires them to follow her in promenade fashion out of sight (Arkadina's refusal to budge establishes her unsympathetic response).

But the audience lined up to watch this play tries to reassemble itself. Arkadina unsuccessfully asks her writer-lover Trigorin to move from the back-row and sit beside her at the front. Masha slides back from her unloved suitor Medvedenko (just as, in the play's real life, she avoids his farewell in the last act).

The soliloquies, left-overs from an older style of playwriting, become natural musings, and it's only at Chekhov's other theatrical moment Schilling cops out, omitting the final suicide and its quiet revelation.

This makes the play bleaker; no emotion-building shock, no feeling for the unknowing Arkadina or chance for Trigorin's sympathetic reaction to Dorn's humane revelation. Just Nina leaving to struggle on and Konstantin left without purpose in life. A charged conclusion becomes emotional nullity. *C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas Chekhov*. Not that we can complain, seeing how British theatre's mangled Shakespeare's endings over the centuries.

'Kretakor' apparently means 'chalk circle.' Let's hope they'll soon be round this way again.

EIF Review

The Seagull (Siráj). 2005 EIF Theatre Programme.

Krétakör Színház's The Seagull is an attack on all of the senses. Translated into contemporary Hungarian (and simultaneously translated during the performances), this is quite a different Chekhov from most productions one gets a chance to see here in Britain. It is bared to the bone, back to basics Chekhov that does not rely upon any sentimentality or the use of extrinsic illusions (costumes, set, special effects).

Instead, Krétakör Színház's director **Árpád Schilling** fleshes out a much more introspective, intellectual Chekhov whose characters are in search of their own inner truths. Stripped to the minimum, the play's similarity to Shakespeare's Hamlet becomes even more visible, and the ongoing theme of dysfunctional families, that haunts all Chekhov's plays, is here given a hardboiled contemporary edge.

Schilling's focus always remains with the actors' in-depth exploration of their roles, which gives his productions, such as Miller's *The Crucible*, Büchner's *Leonce and Lena* and this new production of **Anton Chekhov's The Seagull** an oddly unfinished feel. From the very beginning the audience is initiated into something that feels raw, still in the making. This creates the notion that they are let onto something that perhaps they should not witness after all, and the overall feel is that of a paradox – insecurity and immediacy run simultaneously in the space where anything can happen.

While most other productions in recent years set Chekhov's plays in the late 19th century mode, complete with stereotypical period dress, Krétakör Színház's actors perform their roles in a timeless space, revealing the universality of themes and ideas underneath the surface. Some have criticised Chekhov's work as overwhelmingly dark and lacking humour, but there is plenty of humour in the absurdity of life's situations into which his characters have been placed. The superb cast pick out this uneasy humour and present it in a manner that might cause befuddled titters rather than ruptures of laughter, but it is still there, lurking in the dark corners, a sardonic chuckle at the whole ludicrousness of human existence.

The cast shine individually and as an ensemble. *Eszter Csákányi's* Arkadina is shamelessly full of life, a modern Gertrude occupying her lonely universe with self-delusions of past grandeur, desperately clinging to her lost youth. She is paired nicely with *Tilo Werner's* slimy Trigorin, a self-absorbed and childish character who is torn between two kinds of love – the one grown out of power, and the other conceived in true passion. *Zsolt Nagy* is electrifying as Kostya, and *Annamária Láng's* Nina is a suitably tragic figure in Chekhov's bizarre universe. *László Katona* portrays

Medvedenko who is a bittersweet remnant of a more innocent age, reflected also in gentle performances of Petrusha by *József Gyabronka*, and Dorn by terrific *Sándor Terhes*. *Borbála Péterfy* and *Péter Scherer* offer a finely drawn interplay of a couple locked into an unhappy marriage, but the most surprising of all is the performance of *Lilla Sárosdi* whose Masha is an epitome of a tragic woman's existence, mirrored in other Chekhov's plays, who steals the show on this occasion.

(...)

© Ksenija Horvat 20 August 2005. Published on EdinburghGuide.com
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The Seagull (Siraj)

Another year, another Seagull. But by doing away with even the merest hint of set or scenic finery, visiting Hungarian company Kretakor Szinhaz's stripped down, modern dress version of Chekhov's perennially revived classic forces you to concentrate on - and, therefore, marvel at - the author's incomparable way with characterisation and character interaction.

It helps that the cast, no doubt assisted by speaking in their native language and by Geza Morcsanyi's fuss free translation, are, to a man, brilliant. Zsolt Nagy positively burns with indignation as tortured artist Kostya, enraged by his both his garrulous mother Irina's latest trophy boyfriend and her indifference to his work, and eaten up by his love for unbalanced actress Nina, beautifully realised by the elfin Annamaria Lang. Eszter Csakanyi captures all the vanity and bombast of Irina perfectly and, as it should be, her confrontation of Kostya at the end of Act III crackles with the exhaustingly conflicting emotions of a loveless but interminably bound mother and son. (...)

Árpád Schilling's direction deftly marshals the fun and frivolity of the early ensemble sections and then gives every character their place in the sun, coming to life through Chekhov's trademark minutely detailed two-handed scenes, as the storm clouds gather and events reach their unavoidably tragic conclusion. Special mention should go to Lilla Sarosdi, heart-breaking in the potentially infuriating role of the misery beset Masha, married off to wet blanket teacher Semyon, a wonderfully baleful Laszlo Katona, but pining for Kostya, and Tilo Werner's witty, underplayed turn as Trigorin, Irina's spineless literary flame.

Chris Bartlett, the stage online

Wednesday 24 August 2005 01:30 PM

Unfeeling Chekhov

(Thursday 25 August 2005)

The Seagull

The Hub, Edinburgh Festival

GORDON PARSONS discovers a challenging interpretation of a demanding Russian classic at the Edinburgh Festival.

In a programme interview, visiting Hungarian Kretakor Szinhaz Company director Arpad Schilling asserts that "Chekhov must not be felt or the show will be terribly boring."

This is presumably why he makes no effort to theatre Chekhov's great play.

The actors, at first seated in the audience and dressed in everyday working clothes, appear to be embarking on a rehearsed reading rather than a performance.

With no set, there is no attempt to place Chekhov's people in a social context.

The dialogue is mostly delivered in a perfunctory manner, although, admittedly, this impression is exaggerated through listening to the expressionless voice of the simultaneous translator.

There are moments when the play bursts into life. When Eszter Csakaanyi's Arkadina claims that, as an obviously mature actress, she is still capable of playing a 15-year-old, she responds to the audience's amused incredulity by demonstrating her version of a fluttering, giggly adolescent.

"Is this is the kind of acting you want?" she seems to be challenging the audience.

In fact, the cast constantly acknowledge the audience's presence. Tilo Werner's bored successful writer Trigorin, at one point, borrows a pen from someone in the front row.

"We must concentrate our energies on understanding Chekhov," Schilling claims. He is certainly not about helping us to suspend our disbelief.

He even excises Chekhov's theatrical coup - the final tragic moments when Zsolt Nagy's despairing Konstantin shoots himself offstage, while, onstage, his mother and her guests assuage their boredom by playing cards.

All this throws a great burden onto his actors. Annamaria Lang's Nina, with eyes that convey excited hope mixed with infatuated love, changing in a moment to pain and emptiness as she faces betrayal, overcomes all directorial obstacles.

However, even as she walks out into an empty life, she breaks the theatrical illusion by bowing to an audience that may have been, for a moment, too involved.

Chekhov's realism is never overt. Like Shakespeare, his plays demand interpretation.

There have been political, lyrical, tragicomic, even caricatured treatments of his four great plays, but theatre must be a reciprocal art, not an analytical exercise.

Just as a director can demand the audience to come to meet the play, the production must reach out to them.

Here, those in the audience who stay the course will certainly be left with many searching questions, although, I fear, relatively few answers. Schilling can be satisfied that they will most definitely not "feel Chekhov."

GORDON PARSONS, *Morning Star*

First Night reviews

August 23, 2005

Edinburgh theatre

The Seagull

ROBERT DAWSON SCOTT AT THE HUB

★★★★★

BRIAN McMASTER, the director of the Edinburgh International Festival, apologised for programming a third production of *The Seagull* in five years when he unveiled this year's line-up. His excuse was that this production by Krétakör Színház in Budapest was unique and just too good to miss. And you know what? He was absolutely right.

You are not supposed to say you don't really like Chekhov if you are a drama critic. But only once have I seen one which brought out the comedy and the melancholy which everyone talks about, and that was a Russian production of *The Cherry Orchard* from the Maly Theatre in what was then Leningrad.

I thought you just had to be Russian. Well, it seems you can be Hungarian too.

Several things make Arpád Schilling's production into something unlike any Chekhov production you will have seen. In the first place it is completely contemporary without being self-consciously "updated". The cast are dressed as if they have just come in off the street. There is a thrust stage with no scenery whatever, except a couple of common or garden chairs just like the ones the audience is sitting on. The players are sat among the

audience at the beginning of, and frequently during, the performance. It is played, with the exception of the fragment of Konstantin's weird little play in the first act, with the house lights up.

And yet this almost antitheatre approach throws off all the play's accreted reverence and brings it triumphantly to life. Being in the midst of the action helps: Trigorin, the writer that Arkadina has seduced, has to borrow a pen from a member of the audience to write down his address for Nina for when she comes to Moscow. It also somehow serves to haul ambition — of the fading actress Madame Arkadina, the would-be actress Nina, the would-be writer Konstantin, would-be independent estate manager Shamrayev, and so on — to the forefront.

Some of the playing is incredibly close — a potential disaster had the acting not been of the very highest order. As it is, I have never seen the unfortunate teacher Medvedenko (László Katona) look so haunted. Rarely is Arkadina (Eszter Csákányi) played as a fading old slapper (as opposed to a grande dame).

And more rarely still does the play have Nina, who is after all the title role, so completely at the heart of it. But here Annamária Láng is just that, with a Nina who is youthful, winning, vulnerable, and ultimately heartbreaking.

Box office: 0131-473 2000

Robert Dawson Scott, The Times, 23 August 2005

Feedback from Lithuania

A Theatre Adventure with Krétakör

“The thirty-year old Hungarian director, Árpád Schilling wants no contract in any state theatre. „There is no such thing as an independent or alternative theatre – he says. – There is only theatre as such.” Treplev joins him in his conviction: „Yes, the more I think of it the more I'm convinced it's nothing to do with old or new - one has to write without thinking of forms at all - just let it flow naturally from the heart.” Schilling *Seagull* is a lively, shining, exciting and convincing proof of this thesis. A clear and simple *credo*. The miracle of theatre from nothing. In an empty space. Schilling is sure theatre will be where his company draws its chalk circle (i.e. krétakör). (...) Schilling is not the first to have discovered the magic of the empty stage. All great theatre-reformers of the 20th century had their share of empty stages

and poor theatres. But it is not about old and new forms. Unique is the explorer's fiery zest and the presence with which Schilling's actors fill the room so passionately. (...)

There is no set, there are no costumes in the show. The actors wear what they put on in the morning (I saw them watching a matinee, it is true). As the audience starts to fill the room, they sit among the actors, indiscernible from them. The first dialogue between Masha and Medvedenko sounds as if two spectators were chatting away. It is as if we were sitting on the tram and were forced to listen to two strangers talk. Chekhov's century-old text flows so naturally, as if it were our own thoughts, the actors' private lines and feelings. These performers are true virtuosi at making the impression that they are not playing their parts, but rather living them. (...) Perhaps we could call this a perfectly stylised documentary. A more intimate contact with the spectators would be impossible. We see the tiniest blink, we feel the sparkling of their inner life to the finest nuances.

This interpretation of *The Seagull* is infinitely intriguing. All the players are in the same light, yet each life has a magnetic force of its own. We would equally like to follow the silent Dorn (S. Terhes) and Polina (B. Péterfy), or the more eccentric characters like the deeply moving and brilliant E. Csákányi (Arkadina). (...)

Although the production stays within the frameworks of the classic psychological realism, an elegant word or gesture here and there provides for alienation. Before hotly kissing Polina, Dorn winks at the audience and shakes his tongue at them. Nina looks at the audience desperately: „Is there really no one who can lend Trigorin a pen to write the note?” – oh, thank God, there is someone. He gets a grateful look from Nina later. (Annamária Láng, an actress of great esteem in Hungary, left her village at the age of 17, just like Nina, to live for her passion for the stage. Her acting is very lively and natural.) ... A great V-effect is the ironic smoke-machine in Treplev's theatre, as well as the great performer of Brecht/Weill songs, E. Csákányi, the ever so flirtatious Arkadina, who can always play a young chicken with a spectator. Yes, she can. She is the youngest and the most beautiful here. But in the next moment she can't read a book without her specs.

This *Seagull* is deep and earnest, yet funny and playful, and incredibly witty. Just like Chekhov's plays are. It was no accident that he called *The Seagull* a comedy. This director read the play very closely to the written text. Perhaps that is why it seems so original. (...)

This *Seagull* seems to be the self-portrait of Krétakör. Treplev could be understood as Schilling's alter ego. When talking about theatre and acting in the play, this company speaks of its own absurd situation, too: the best Hungarian theatre has no place of its own, not to mention a steady state subsidy. Zs. Nagy is so honest and heart-breaking in his presentation of the young, neurotic, over-sensitive artist and in not wanting an actress for a mother. Arkadina wants to be on stage and in life all the time. Csákányi's

every appearance, every little noise or look of the eye tell us to watch her: it is her monologue, she is the “most sensitive and most caring Mother in the world, who can dress his son’s wounds with the most elegant gesture”.

In the final scene Treplev treads on his violin, renouncing art altogether. The others applaud. This is the only deviation from the original text. Perhaps Krétakör is less interested in the suicide of a single human being than in the state of art and artist of all times.”

Undíne Adamaite

From an interview with the director before our tour to Portugal

You said in an interview that theatre must be strongly rooted in society. How is that true for The Seagull – the play and the show?

The *Seagull* is no social drama. It discusses the life strategies of certain people and the conflicts evolving from them. Chekhov describes everyday lies with a surgeon’s precision, he reveals human nature with ruthless irony and no mercy. Each character wants to fulfil his/her own intention and these intentions rarely coincide and even when they do they do not follow the same course for a long time. The point is the overwhelming power of the ego. Chekhov is a great master of spiritual characterisation, for he is ready to push his own artistic ambitions into the background for the sake of the exactly analyzed characters. He does not tell a story, he describes a syndrome. His solutions are eternal, but to understand them as great social processes or artistic messages would be oversimplifying them. The real masters do not send heated messages, they rather observe their subject from a distance and depict them without drawing moral conclusions

What is your point of view about the way directors work with text, considering that you cut some parts of The Seagull?

Each director walks his /her own way, I can only speak for myself. With the *Seagull*, understanding the author’s original intention was my goal and I barely interfered with the text. I made one major cut, I left out Treplev’s suicide at the end of the last act. In an extremely simplified theatre language, where the actors are willing to identify with their characters in front of the audience, thereby giving up all well-known outward tools, this suicide would have been quite ridiculous. And on top of that, I felt an intellectual suicide, experienced by many artists’ children in history, was much more depressing and understandable for me. There is nothing more pathetic than the bitter experience when you have to face your own lack of talent and your

unalterable loneliness and I think, if knowing that, you have to carry on living, that is what we might call a failure of life.

How do you choose the texts for your shows?

Decisive moments of my own life determine the road which leads me to my theatre work. My theatre is a subjective one – this being its strength and its weakness at the same time.

What's your working method?

Every play, every production needs a different attitude. With the Seagull the first and most important step was a long analytical process. For a month we only debated Chekhov's text with the actors sentence by sentence. After that we went away to a distant mountain cottage and for ten days we improvised in order to understand the processes within the scenes. Then the actors learnt the text and for six weeks we staged the whole play scene by scene. The work goes on to this day and will last long, I think. I encourage the actors not to give up searching for their characters' inner truths and the sentences following from them. I have only just understood the inner arch of act three. I am hungrily waiting to finally get the other three.

How do you think an actor should approach a role?

It is mostly his intelligence an actor has to entice. An actor who can only work from his guts must be born a genius or his work isn't worth a penny. He, who does not understand the sentences, cannot understand the role and has no idea of the author's intentions. Chekhov must not be felt, for then the show will be terribly boring. Let us face the fact that Chekhov was cleverer than any of us working in the theatre today and therefore we must concentrate all our energy on understanding him. The use of various effects betrays but the pooriness of the thinking.

What is for you the most important thing in theatre and why? What is the role of danger/risk in your shows? How did that work in The Seagull?

The most important job in the theatre is to make it interesting for the spectator the thing we, artists cannot live without. The danger for us is to fail at that. In *The Seagull* I think we did okay.

ÁRPÁD SCHILLING

Born in 1974, he has been in the theatre since he was seventeen and soon left acting for directing.

Schilling founded Krétakör in 1995, before he started his formal directing studies at the Budapest Academy of Theatre. During his studies he continued working with Krétakör, back then a free group, making eight, mostly award-winning productions; but he also staged several productions at the internationally known Katona József Theatre, among them Tasnádi's *Public Enemy* (1999) and Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* (2000), as well as Chekhov's *Platonov* (1999) with students of the Strasbourg National Theatre.

His most important work with Krétakör of this period was Brecht's *Baal* (1998), whose international success introduced Schilling's name in the European theatre world.

After graduating at the Academy in 2000 – as a student of Gábor Székely - , together with Máté Gáspár and with a handful of actors he established Krétakör as a steady company and produced two to three performances in a season for an ever-growing public.

After *NEXXT* by Tasnádi, *The Possessed* by Miller, *Liliom* by Molnár and *Leonce and Lena* by Büchner – the latter two still on the repertory in Budapest and on tours – he made *W – Workers' Circus*, after Büchner's *Woyzeck*, a performance with an international success characterized by many invitations and half a dozen prizes (from Belgrade's BITEF through Sarajevo to Canada).

After a satirical-political revue *Fatherland, my all...* (Hazámhazám), Jerofeyev's *Walpurgis Night* (2002) at the Schaubühne, Berlin and Shakespeare's *Richard III.* (2003) at the Piccolo Teatro, Milan, in 2003 Schilling directed a highly praised and internationally rewarded *Seagull* by Chekhov (Siráj). This performance won five prizes (from the critics as from the public) at the Hungarian national theatre festival POSZT in 2004, and has been on tour since its making in over a dozen cities from Belfast to Vilnius, from Lisbon to Moscow, Edinburgh, Vienna or Amsterdam. In 2004 he directed Molière's *The Misanthrope* and, as a collective creation of the company, *BLACKland* – a satirical-critical work of today's world. In 2005 he staged a three-men-version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at the Casino of the Burgtheater, Vienna, and Tasnádi's *Phaidra* in an international co-production for the Salzburger Festspiele, played in Salzburg, Zurich, Stuttgart, Berlin and Budapest. In 2006 he did the first production of the German playwright, Roland Schimmelpfennig's *Before/After* in coproduction with the Katona József Theatre.

His films: *NEXXT* – 2001, *No comment* – 2003, *Overborder* (Határontúl) - the latter was shown at the Venice Film Festival and won the Prize for the Best European Short Film at the Anger Festival.

Among the many prizes and awards one of the most important is the Stanislavski-prize he received in Moscow, December 2005.

Ten years ago Árpád Schilling collected a few of his friends and with an intense team work staged Jean Cocteau's *Terrible Children*. He named it *The Big Game*. This is how Krétakör (Chalk Circle) was started.

This name refers to Brecht's play on the one hand, but its real inspiration was the ancient fable: we designate a circle in space, in which we condense a piece of our existence as long as its truth comes out. The circle drawn with a chalk is a metaphor of transience and constant rebirth – it is easy to draw, but just as easy to erase and redraw somewhere else, where our special space, the theatre will be born.

Krétakör has kept this flexibility of thought and form to this day, even if gradually it has become a permanent company with a steady repertoire in the meantime. What was once a handful of beginners in an off theatre, has by now, after ten years of hard work, become one of the best theatres in Hungary or even Europe. Krétakör's colourful repertory speaks to everyone, regardless of age or social status, everyone looking for the experience of art in an active manner.

The company, awarded with the most prestigious awards in Hungary has in the past years become the prime representative of Hungarian drama theatre abroad. Comparing the knowledge we acquire on our international tours with our experience at home, we are now searching for new interpretations of the theatre as a community forum.

In this spirit, Krétakör awaits its spectators with challenging productions and various other events in its anniversary year.

For further information, please consult: www.kretakor.hu, kretakor@kretakor.hu